NUMB. DVII.

The SPECTATOR.

Defendit numerus, junctæque umbone phalanges. Juv.

Saturday, October 11. 1712.

THERE is ſomething very Sublime, tho' very Fanciful, in *Plato*'s Deſcription of the Supreme Being, that *Truth is his Body, and Light his Shadow*. According to this Definition, there is nothing ſo contradictory to his Nature as Error and Falſhood. The Platoniſts have ſo juſt a Notion of the Almighty's Averſion to every thing which is falſe and erroneous, that they look upon *Truth* as no leſs neceſſary than *Virtue*, to qualifie an Human Soul for the Enjoyment of a happy State. For this Reaſon, as they recommended Moral Duties to qualifie and ſeaſon the Soul for a future Life, ſo they preſcribed ſeveral Contemplations and Sciences to rectifie the Underſtanding. Thus *Plato* has called Mathematical Demonſtrations the Catharticks or Purgatives of the Soul, as being the moſt proper Means to cleanſe it from Error, and to give it a Reliſh of Truth, which is the natural Food and Nouriſhment of the Underſtanding, as Virtue is the Perfection and Happineſs of the Will.

There are many Authors who have ſhewn wherein the Malignity of a *Lie* conſiſts, and ſet forth, in proper Colours, the Heinouſneſs of the Offence. I ſhall here conſider one Particular Kind of this Crime, which has not been ſo much ſpoken to: I mean, that abominable Practice of *Party-lying*. This Vice is ſo very predominant among us at preſent, that a Man is thought of no Principles, who does not propagate a certain Syſtem of Lies. The Coffee-Houſes are ſupported by them, the Preſs is choaked with them, emi-nent Authors live upon them. Our Bottle-Converſation is ſo infected with them, that a Party-Lie is grown as faſhionable an Entertainment, as a lively Catch or a merry Story: The Truth of it is, half the great Talkers in the Nation would be ſtruck dumb, were this Fountain of Diſcourſe dryed up. There is, however, one Advantage reſulting from this deteſtable Practice; the very Appearances of Truth are ſo little regarded, that Lies are at preſent diſcharged in the Air, and begin to hurt no Body. When we hear a Party-ſtory from a Stranger, we conſider whether he is a Whig or a Tory that relates it, and immediately conclude they are Words of Courſe, in which the honeſt Gentleman deſigns to recommend his Zeal, without any Concern for his Veracity. A Man is looked upon as bereft of common Senſe, that gives Credit to the Relations of Party-Writers, his own Friends ſhake their Heads at him, and conſider him in no other Light than as an officious Fool or a well-meaning Ideot. When it was formerly the Faſhion to husband a Lie, and trump it up in ſome extraordinary Emergency, it generally did Execution, and was not a little ſerviceable to the Faction that made uſe of it; but at preſent every Man is upon his Guard; the Artifice has been too often repeated to take Effect.

I have often wondered to ſee Men of Probity, who would ſcorn to utter a Falſhood for their own particular Advantage, give ſo readily into a Lie when it is become the Voice of their Faction, notwithſtanding they are thoroughly ſenſible of it as ſuch. How is it poſſible for thoſe, who are Men of Honour in their Perſons, thus to become Notorious Liars in their Party? If we look into the Bottom of this Matter,

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Matter, we may find, I think, three Reaſons for it, and at the ſame time diſcover the Inſufficiency of theſe Reaſons to juſtifie ſo Criminal a Practice.

In the firſt place, Men are apt to think that the Guilt of a Lie, and conſequently the Puniſhment, may be very much diminiſhed, if not wholly worn out, by the Multitudes of thoſe who partake in it. Though the Weight of a Falſhood would be too heavy for *one* to bear, it grows light in their Imaginations, when it is ſhared among *many*. But in this Caſe a Man very much deceives himſelf; Guilt, when it ſpreads through Numbers, is not ſo properly divided as multiplied: Every one is criminal in proportion to the Offence which he commits, not to the Number of thoſe who are his Companions in it. Both the Crime and the Penalty lie as heavy upon every Individual of an offending Multitude, as they would upon any ſingle Perſon, had none ſhared with him in the Offence. In a Word, the Diviſion of Guilt is like that of Matter, though it may be ſeparated into infinite Portions, every Portion ſhall have the whole Eſſence of Matter in it, and conſiſt of as many Parts as the whole did before it was divided.

But in the ſecond place, though Multitudes, who join in a Lie, cannot exempt themſelves from the Guilt, they may from the Shame of it. The Scandal of a Lie is in a manner loſt and annihilated, when diffuſed among ſeveral Thouſands; as a Drop of the blackeſt Tincture wears away and vaniſhes, when mixed and confuſed in a conſiderable Body of Water: The Blot is ſtill in it, but is not able to diſcover it ſelf. This is certainly a very great Motive to ſeveral Party-Offenders, who avoid Crimes, not as they are prejudicial to their Virtue, but to their Reputation. It is enough to ſhew the Weakneſs of this Reaſon, which palliates Guilt without removing it, that every Man, who is influenced by it, declares himſelf in effect an infamous Hypocrite, prefers the Appearance of Virtue to its Reality, and is determined in his Conduct neither by the Dictates of his own Conſcience, the Suggeſtions of true Honour, nor the Principles of Religion.

The third and laſt great Motive for Mens joining in a popular Falſhood, or, as I have hitherto called it, a Party-Lie, notwithſtanding they are convinced of it as ſuch, is the doing Good to a Cauſe which every Party may be ſuppoſed to look upon as the moſt meritorious. The Unſoundneſs of this Principle has been ſo often expoſed, and is ſo univerſally acknowledged, that a Man muſt be an utter Stranger to the Principles, either of natural Religion or Chriſtianity, who ſuffers himſelf to be guided by it. If a Man might promote the ſuppoſed Good of his Country by the blackeſt Calumnies and Falſhoods, our Nation abounds more in Patriots than any other of the Chriſtian World. When *Pompey* was deſired not to ſet Sail in a Tempeſt that would hazard his Life, *It is neceſſary for me*, ſays he, *to Sail, but it is not neceſſary for me to Live*: Every Man ſhould ſay to himſelf, with the ſame Spirit, It is my Duty to ſpeak Truth, tho' it is not my Duty to be in an Office. One of the Fathers has carried this Point ſo high, as to declare *he would not tell a Lie though he were ſure to gain Heaven by it:* However extravagant ſuch a Proteſtation may appear, every one will own, that a Man may ſay very reaſonably *he would not tell a Lie, if he were ſure to gain Hell by it*; or, if you have a mind to ſoften the Expreſſion, that he would not tell a Lie to gain any Temporal Reward by it, when he ſhould run the hazard of loſing much more than it was poſſible for him to gain.

Advertiſements and Letters continue to be taken in by S. Buckley *at the* Dolphin *in* Little-Britain, J. Tonſon *at* Shakeſpear's-*Head in the* Strand, C. Lillie *at the Corner of* Beauford Buildings, *and* A. Baldwin *in* Warwick-Lane.

ADVERTISEMENTS.

At the Deſire of ſeveral Perſons of Quality.
By her Majeſty's Company of Comedians.

AT the Theatre Royal in Drury-Lane this preſent Saturday being the 11th Day of October, will be preſented a Play call'd, The Humorous Lieutenant. The Part of the King by Mr. Keene, Demetrius by Mr. Wilks, Leontius by Mr. Powel, the Lieutenant by Mr. Pinkethman, Celia by Mrs. Oldfield, Lucippe by Mr. Pack, and all the other Parts to the beſt Advantage. By Her Majeſty's Command no Perſons are to be admitted behind the Scenes.

This Day is Publiſh'd,

The Hiſtory of Joſeph, a Poem in Six Books, with Cuts proper to each Book. By W. Roſe, Rector of E. Clandon in Surrey. Printed for James Knapton at the Crown in St. Paul's Church-Yard. Where may be had Dr. Wells's Hiſtorical Geography of the Old and New Teſtament in 4 Vols. And his Paraphraſe on the Galatians and Romans.

The Corpus Omnium Poetarum Latinorum, ſecundum Seriem Temporum, in two large Volumes Folio, being now finiſhed, will be ready to be deliver'd by the twentieth of November next. Notice is now given that thoſe that have Subſcribed, or intend to do ſo, pay in their firſt Payment, and enter their Names, by the tenth of November, 1712, after which it will be 50s. in Quires Small, and 5 Guineas Large Paper, it making about 50 Sheets more than propoſed, beſides the Largeneſs of the Index, &c. The Undertakers are Jacob Tonſon at Shakeſpear's Head in the Strand; John Nicholſon at the Queens Arms in Little Britain; and Benj. Tooke at the Temple Gate; where Subſcriptions are taken in, and at moſt other Bookſellers in Town and Country.

LONDON: Printed for *S. Buckley*, and *J. Tonſon*: And Sold by *A. Baldwin* in *Warwick-lane*.